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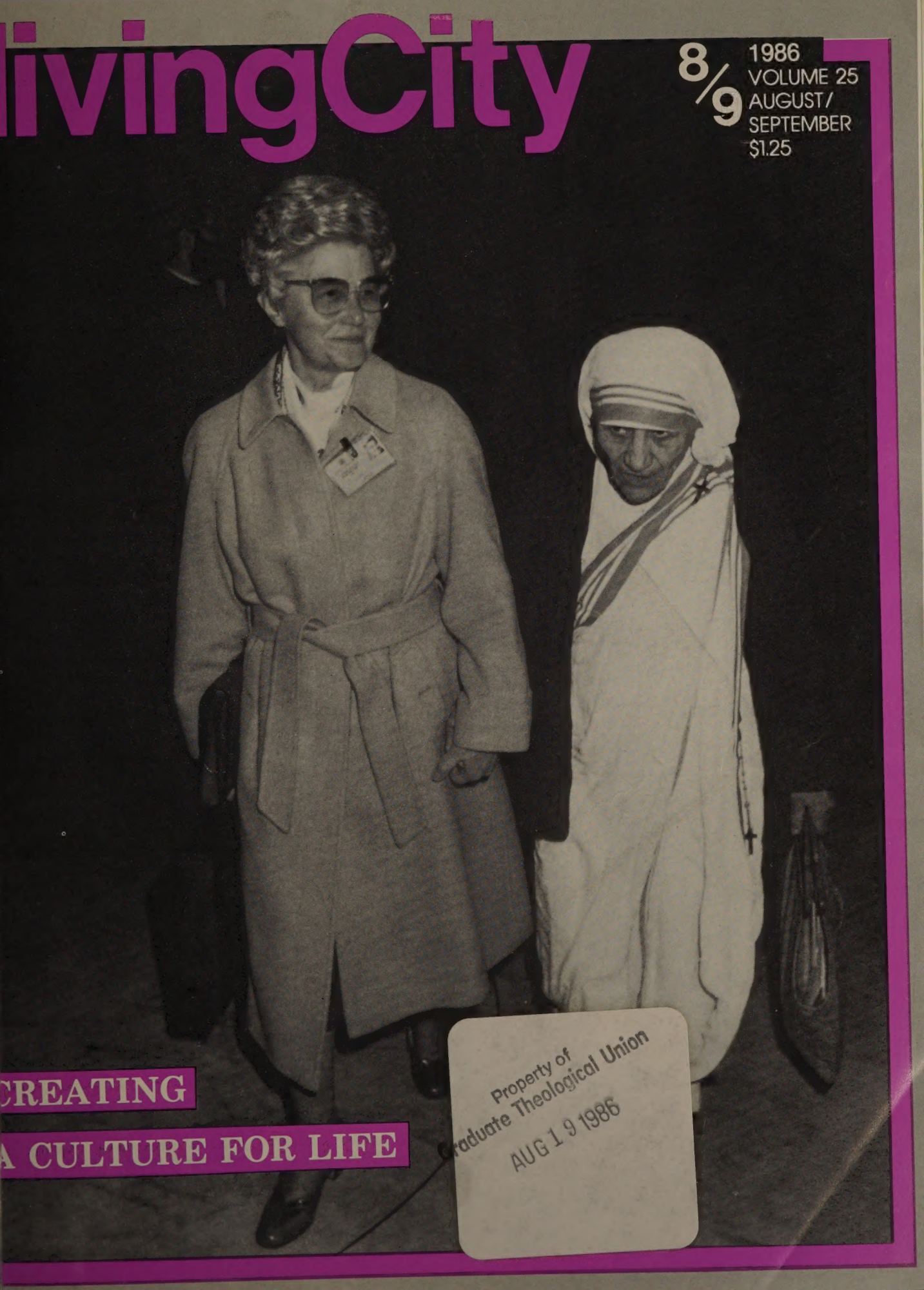

CREATING
A CULTURE FOR LIFE

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5 *EVERY LIFE CALLS FOR LOVE: lights of Chiara Lubich's address at th ference in Florence.*

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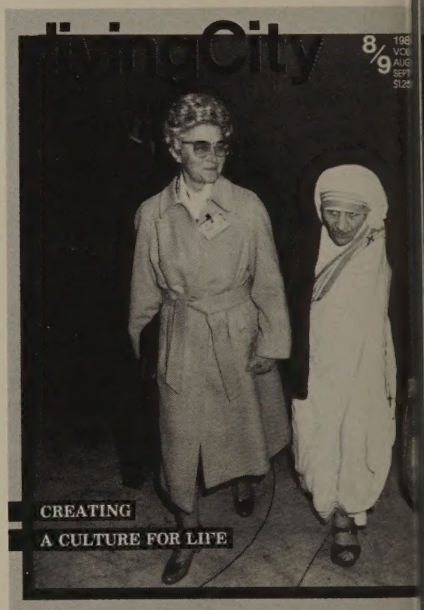

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CREATING A CULTURE FOR LIFE

It was a record pre-summer heat wave in Florence on Pentecost Sunday; nonetheless the crowds waited for hours at the gates of the Sports Palace. It was a standing room only crowd and late comers had to be turned away. In the corridors of the stadium those without seats were able to follow the program through TV monitors. Fortunately for the surrounding region of Tuscany, television carried the major portion of the day which was organized by the Movement for Life. Even Pope John Paul II sent a telegram extending his best wishes and support for the occasion. As coincidence would have it, Florence was declared the Capital of European Culture for 1986 by the European Common Market and this gathering of 15,000 people marked the first major event to celebrate it. Many people like the famous and sainted former Mayor of Florence, George La Pira, have spoken of the prophetic role of this city in the development of world culture.

The main attractions of the day were two women small in stature, the least likely to seek out all this attention: Chiara Lubich and Mother Teresa of Calcutta. They came to talk about a subject in which their thoughts meet as one: God's love for creation and humankind's answer to this love. In fact before the program began Chiara and Mother Teresa met in a little room and signed an "Appeal to Europe" which is a Christian revision of the Charter of the Rights of the Child (which we include on page 7).

They are different in every way: in nationality, language, in personal background as well

s in the works they have ounded in the Church. They iffer in appearance and per- onal style, in the character- stics of their apostolate. Yet heir oneness is a most strik- ng, palpable and extraordinary iving example of the phrase of Scripture: "There are different gifts but the same Spirit ... who produces all these gifts, distributing them to each as he wills."

Carlo Casini, deputy of the Italian Parliament as well as of the Parliament of the European Common Market and untiring leader of the Movement for Life, commented that in unity these two true women of our time "personify the Movement for Life and bear witness with facts, to the value of life." In different ways but in deepest unity, these two women seemed to raise their song to life this day.

The program was opened by the Fiesole School of Music Orchestra, and Gen Verde, the international women's musical group of the Focolare Movement, which presented "the dance of the peoples," sang their song, "Every Life Calls for Love," and interspersed their songs between the various talks of the mayor and cardinal of Florence and other prominent personalities from the European Parliament. Also the classical dance company of Liliana Cosi and Marinel Stefanescu performed. The talks of Chiara and Mother Teresa were followed with emotion and great attention.

Chiara was first to speak and in her talk she laid a foundation for the development of a culture of life based on love to replace the culture of death which is emerging in our times.

She showed a deep understanding of the problems which lead to abortion and yet demonstrated that there is no situation devoid of hope. Chiara directed her words to all people of good will and invited everyone to make of their lives "one continuous act of love towards every neighbor." In this way, every person can start immediately to give their contribution to building the civilization of love with all that that implies for every human life.

The spontaneous rounds of applause from the audience resounded like "yeses" to love.

Then came Mother Teresa. It's hard to describe the reaction that this tiny woman produces. The years, the deprivation, the fatigue have reduced her to her curved and miniature size. She came forward to the microphone in her sandled bare feet, with her gnarled fingers in which she continually held a rosary. Her warm and youthful voice came as a surprise. She invited everyone to pray with her and then with the bold simplicity of the poor in spirit she spoke the truth: "To abort is to destroy the image of God." "In order to be real, love must hurt." "In China I said to one of the communist heads of government, Who is a communist for me? Nothing other than a brother or sister." With the greatest ease she stated: "I beg of you, if you hear of anyone who does not want a child, who wants to abort, convince them to bring the child to me because I want that child. It is ►

the sign of God's love." No one doubted her words. A minute earlier she had commented: "In Calcutta we feed 9,000 persons for free every day."

When Chiara unexpectedly embraced the little Missionary of Charity as she returned to her seat, no one remained without a catch in their throat. During different high points of the two talks even the mayor of Florence abandoned his official reserve and broke into unrestrained applause.

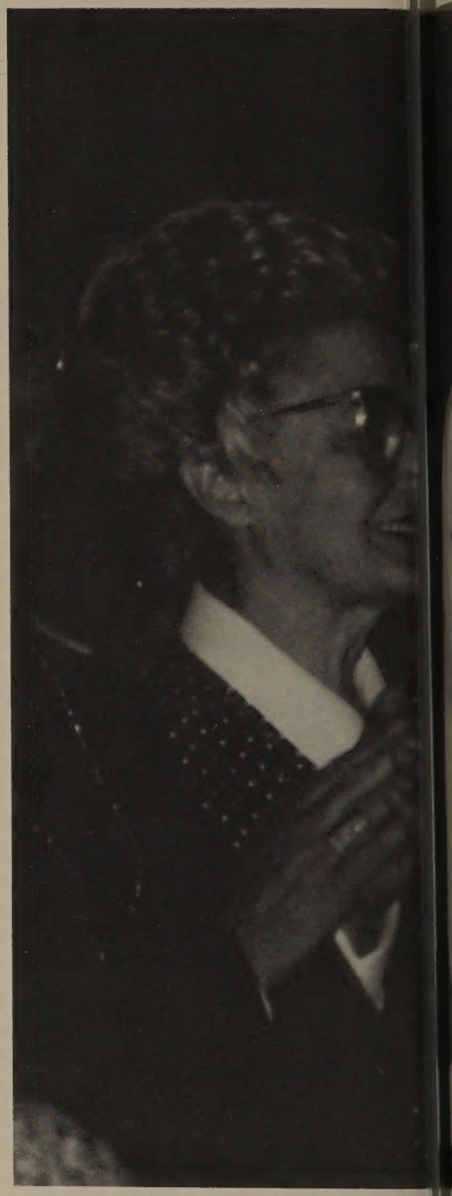
People of all ages and ideologies responded with an enthusiasm beyond all expectation of the organizers. It was so clear that to ally oneself with the cause for life meant simply to live as a civilized people. The concept that the Humanism, and the Renaissance of this century would be identified primarily with the challenge to guard the dignity of the human person and the inalienable right to life from the youngest to the oldest, seemed clear and commonly held by all.

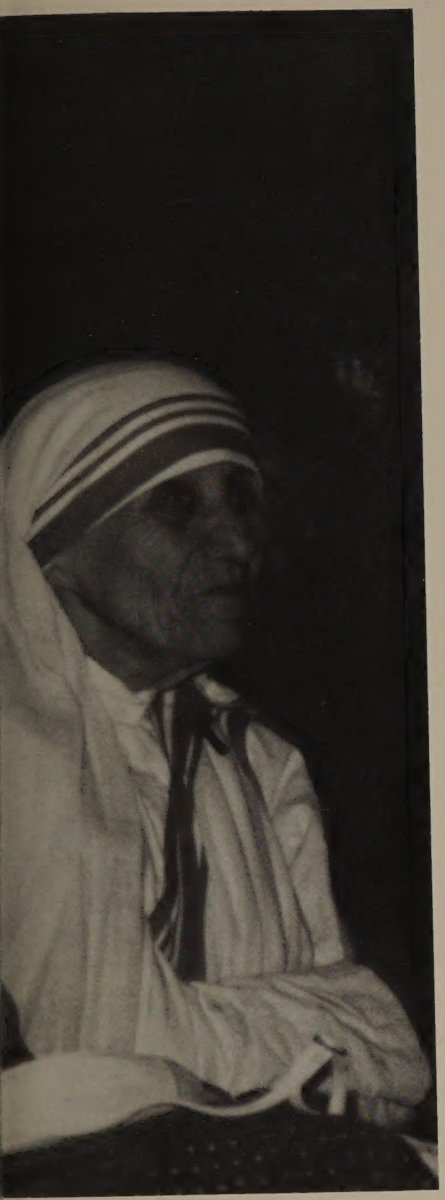
A city official from Lucca expressed himself in this way: "I felt that there was a cosmic power in what I heard today." The president of the Catholic Women's Rights Movement said, "In Chiara's talk there were all the problems of today, but also all the solutions." An industrialist from the city of Prato commented: "There is no need to have fear, because people like Chiara and Mother Teresa exist. If we look at them, we find hope." A teacher who considers herself a nonbeliever said: "The love that we were presented with placed us before our responsibilities and didn't allow for any spiritualistic escapes." A "punk-styled" student confided: "I liked the fact that Chiara said fathers and mothers are not masters of their children. I understood why people shouldn't abort."

The custodian of the Sports Palace: "These two big personalities clarified—in a few words—how we should live, things that others can't say even with a lot of words." A gentleman who is a psychoanalyst and an agnostic observed: "Two beautiful women, harmoniously fulfilled." A police officer said: "I'm here because I was assigned to cover the event, not because I wanted to be here. All the same I'm leaving with the intention of refinding my Christianity." A journalist left with the resolve: "I must do something, too."

The Archbishop of Florence, Cardinal Piovanelli spoke in tribute to women referring to their role as a "ministry of life." It was an enlightening definition, an objective, a direction that all women can identify with whatever their view might be.

For this gathering entitled "Before Everything: Life" it was necessary to find women representative of different ways of"serving life" in society: first of all there were Chiara and Mother Teresa, the various performers, then Lady Diana Elles, vice president of the Parliament of Europe with her appeal for the rebirth of families in Europe and for a scientific reevaluation of the "Christian alternative" to the policy of materialism; Marlene Lenz, president of the Commission of the Parliament of Europe for the Rights of Women who gave a courageous and openly Christian address; Cory Aquino, who made her presence felt through a strongly supportive telegram; Danuta Walesa, the wife of Polish Solidarity leader, Lech Walesa, who in her warm and very personal letter, used the word "solidarity" nine times. On this occasion, however, she used solidarity to mean the specific vocation of women: solidarity with humankind, solidarity with the youngest and smallest, with the least. After the final round of applause the people in thousands walked out into the evening air, their faces flushed and warm yet relaxed. This gathering was for many the first step of a journey in hope. In the heart of the city of Florence, the





magnificent dome of its celebrated basilica seemed to reacquire its original meaning. The dome was the work, the gift of the genius of a Christian Europe to Mary, in fact the name of the basilica of Florence is "Santa Maria del Fiore." The artist who designed this jewel also designed the famous "Hospital of the Innocents," an architectural masterpiece of the Florentine Renaissance, which is an institute dedicated to, and is still caring for, abandoned children. Everything appeared new and luminously symbolic, seemingly recalling the events of Pentecost when "there was great joy throughout the city."

Laura Draghi

Every life calls for love

Chiara began with an outline of the sacredness of life as shown by Sacred Scripture, the teachings of the Church Fathers and the thought of Pope John Paul II. She then continued:

"Our present day social context calls for a decisive commitment on the part of every person of good will to defend life from its first moment to its final pulsation in life's inevitable decline.

We know that the child to be born is a human being from the moment of conception. The child therefore, cannot be considered an extension of the mother: he or she is another human being. Children are not their mother's property. There are no rights over them once they have begun to exist. On the contrary, there is a basic duty to do everything possible to enable them to be born. A woman's greatness, her personal growth lies in being the cause of life, not in suppressing the child of her womb.

Motherhood, however, does not always bring joy and hope to the hearts of mothers. At times motherhood costs. It costs suffering and sacrifice. To give birth to children, to raise, support and educate them entails anxieties, worries, sleepless nights, disappointments, money. At times the generative act is not an act of love, but an act of violence, outside or inside matrimony. Sometimes disadvantaged economic situations make it more difficult to accept a baby. At times the precarious physical condition of the woman can weigh heavily on the decision to have a child. The woman who works outside the home and at the same time looks after the house, can feel overburdened and less willing to bear children. At times a child results from an immature relationship between two partners who are unprepared to welcome it. Frequently, due to the lack of understanding around her, and since society is so influenced by consumerism and the race for financial well-being, the woman experiences a painful loneliness in resisting the temptation to abort.

Yet God repeats in one of the Ten Commandments: "Do not kill."

But God is not a tyrant. If he is demanding, it is because he has provided the way even in difficult circumstances, and has given the means to help carry out this commandment. How? God relies on the love which exists in the human heart and has strengthened it in a divine way. On this love he has engrafted the love that comes from above, and has lit the flame of divine love in the human heart.

It is always an amazing spectacle to see how in springtime the warmth of the sun can ►

transform nature. Everything comes to life and blooms.

It is a marvelous sight to see. During the winter, the earth had been protecting the seeds which now palpitate with life. But it takes the warmth of the sun to make them blossom.

It doesn't happen simply because spring arrives according to the calendar. If the sun arrived earlier, even during winter, the ground wouldn't wait for spring, but would burst into bloom just the same. Just as in nature it is the sun that makes life blossom, in the same way only love in the human heart can bring about the triumph of life.

We have said that there exists a culture of death in our world today. A great current of Christian love spreading out into our society would be the best preventive medicine for these modern evils and could provide the strength to eliminate or at least reduce them.

Love is the concentrate of the gospel; it is the specific vocation of the followers of Christ. We must revive divine love in the human heart; it is the fire that Jesus brought on earth and he wants it to be lit. It was given to us in baptism and by frequenting the other sacraments, by practicing the virtues shown us by Christ, by praying, this love is maintained, nourished, grows and enables the burden of parenthood to be easy and light for parents.

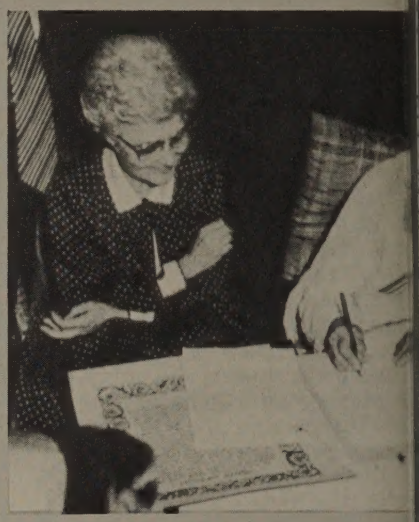
This was the experience of the early Christians. For this reason they obeyed what Jesus, and later the Apostles and later still the Church Fathers, said. And they did it with joy. If today's mothers have this love in their hearts, they will find no difficulty in giving life to the children that God asks of them. They will be able to courageously face even the most difficult situations.

And if love is kept alive in the hearts of Christians, it will not be hard to ask men to share in the responsibility of child rearing. Children in fact do not belong to the mother alone, but to both parents.

Nowadays there is a tendency to portray motherhood as a subject concerning only women. But it is not so. Love will generate in men's hearts a sense of responsibility toward the lives to which they have given origin. If we lose sight of this common responsibility, we destroy the very meaning of the family as a community of two people united in love, with life in view. If we lose sight of this common responsibility humanity will separate in two: the woman and the child on one side; and the man, selfish and indifferent, on the other.

Furthermore, love for God and love for neighbor nourish one another. For example, the deeper a plant thrusts down its roots into the ground, the higher it shoots up towards the sky. In the same way, the more a Christian loves others, the more intense will be his or her union with God. And in this union with God, the Christian finds a renewed need for prayer, and with this, a love for continence.

Charity, love is the queen of all the virtues. Love generates the virtues. It gives birth to purity and chastity, and it extinguishes all selfishness. He who loves masters his passions, has respect for others and,



Chiara Lubich and Mother Teresa of Calcutta sign an "Appeal to Europe." The message was then sent to the leaders of the European Common Market and the countries which belong to it.

therefore, also toward his wife and the new human being which is to come to life in her womb. With this kind of love, it is possible to effectively put into practice responsible parenthood.

It is not enough, however, to love the unborn child. Human beings need love at every stage of their life and in every situation. Also every child that is born needs love. In an atmos phere of love, children can acquire the interior disposition which develops into a capacity for sharing which is the foundation for forming proper relationships with others."

"Chiara then continued by referring to the different life stages and spoke of the need of adolescents for love and dialogue with their parents.

And if parents experience difficulties and suffering—almost as if they were continuing to generate life in the child—it will be their love permeated with

AN APPEAL TO EUROPE

In Florence, proclaimed the capital of European culture for 1986, men and women gathered in thousands on May 17, 1986 around Chiara Lubich and Mother Teresa of Calcutta to reflect on the value of human life. They expressed the common desire that a united Europe progress as an instrument of peace founded on the dignity of the human person. This appeal is directed to the heads of the institutions of the European community and to the countries which compose it.

Just as a Christian Florence was the cradle of Humanism and the Renaissance, so too may Europe whose roots are Christian, be the heart of a new Renaissance, animated by a sense of ethics which values the human person: glory of the Living God, and of the highest order of creation. May the first stone of the edifice of peace be respect for human life, particularly that which is newly born, suffering and dying.

In this context of a new European humanism and of a reawakening of always more necessary moral energies, may a European charter of the Rights of the Child be written and approved. As it fulfills the principles already contained in the universal declaration of 1959, may it urge Europe on to give to its children—before and after birth—the best of itself.

Joining in this appeal,

Mother Teresa m.c. Chiara Lubich

(own translation)

suffering that will reach the child and remind him or her of the greatness of giving oneself to others, of the value of sacrifice, and respect for their companions at school or work.

Also engaged couples need love. Once married they will become collaborators with the Creator in bringing new life into the world. Therefore they need to learn to cultivate love which is the nourishment of life. "To give true love to one another," said Igino Giordani[1] to a group of engaged couples, "means to give God, God's love, to one another," because supernatural love purifies, fortifies and makes human love enduring.

Moreover, life is not always as it should be. People are free but at times they seriously abuse their freedom to the detriment of others. People can find themselves faced with painful situations: an unwanted child, or an illegitimate child, or perhaps a child that is the result of violence, or an abandoned child. Here we meet one of the greatest mysteries of life: the suffering of the innocent. What answer does love give? Jesus who died and rose for every person can give us a new way of looking at, of recognizing—even in these cases—the immense value of every life.

In every family or community that has blossomed from Christian love, there is also room for the mother who carries her pregnancy alone and who finds herself in serious difficulty because she is rejected by her family. It is often the timely availability of another family, or of a community, that helps many mothers say "yes" to life when they find themselves gripped by doubt and anguish with no prospects for the future.

The way that families can give their typical and irreplaceable contribution is by taking in—either through adoption or guardianship—children who have been abandoned or given up. Abandoned children, even the very young, almost always have a past that is interwoven with suffering and trauma. The dominating note of their personality is the lack of affection. In these cases love is the first and only medicine. Love enables children to overcome their difficulties and fully recover, achieving a human fulfillment worthy of a son or daughter of God.

There can be many other difficult situations throughout life. Life must be respected in all of these moments. If at the basis of laws or social projects we place a mentality lacking in respect for the suffering, the handicapped and the elderly, then little by little we create a false society. We give importance only to a few values like physical well-being, strength, exaggerated productivity and power while we distort the purpose for which a nation lives; that is, for the good of the human person and society.

Health, as we know, is a precious gift which should be protected. Thus we should do all we can so that our bodies and everyone else's, too, receive nourishment and rest, and are not exposed to sicknesses, to accidents or to an exaggerated amount of sports. The body is important for a Christian. But if there is a loss of health, we must remember that there is a Life which is not conditioned by the state of our health, but by the supernatural love that burns in our hearts. And it is this superior Life which gives value to our physical life even when we are sick. If we consider illnesses merely from a ►

human point of view, we can only affirm that they are misfortunes. But, if we look at illnesses from a Christian point of view, we can see that they are trials in which we must train ourselves for the great trial which awaits all of us, when we will have to face the passage to the next Life.

Didn't the Holy Father just recently say that illnesses are spiritual exercises, sermons that God himself preaches to us? People who are sick have a richness that others do not have; a richness of another kind. In speaking of asceticism and mysticism, the Church refers to illnesses not only in reference to the field of medicine, but as purifications that God sends, therefore as small steps towards union with God. In addition, our faith tells us that in sickness a person participates in the sufferings of Christ. In this light, the sick person is another Christ crucified who can offer his or her suffering for what is of most value, the eternal salvation of all people.

In the frenzy of work and daily life we are tempted at times to see people who suffer only as marginal cases to help so that they can quickly recover and return to their activities. It doesn't occur to us that they are the ones who even now can do the most, who can contribute the most. People who are ill can positively carry out their role on behalf of humanity only if they are understood and loved. Love can help them to give meaning to their condition and to be aware of what they represent.

And what holds true for the sick, holds true also for the handicapped. People with a handicap need love. They need to be recognized for the value that their life has: it is sacred, as every other life is sacred, with all the consequent dignity. They need to be considered as persons and, as much as possible, live normal lives among other people.

What should we say about the elderly? Every life calls for love, and the elderly are no exception. Today even the elderly constitute a problem because of the increased number of people in this age category due to the higher average life expectancy.

Thus we are aware of a ten dency in society to isolate the elderly, to consider them as a social burden because they are no longer productive. We speak of the elderly as a category apart, almost as if we were not speaking of human beings. Besides the inevitable physical decline they experience, the elderly can become discouraged considering themselves as useless. We must give new hope to the elderly. Advanced age is nothing other than the third season of life: life that is born, develops, and declines are nothing other than three aspects of the one mystery of all life which derives from God—Love.

In certain Asian and African countries, the elderly are highly respected because they are viewed as experts of life, because they possess wisdom. In fact, the elderly person emphasizes what is essential, what is most important. We remember what was said about Saint John the Evangelist. At the age of eighty, while visiting the Christian communities, he was asked about the message of Jesus. He always replied: "Love one another," as if he had nothing more to add. With this phrase he had truly focused on the central thought of Christ. To distance ourselves from the elderly is to deprive ourselves of a patrimony. We must value them by loving them.

And we must value them even when they are sick and seriously ill, when there is no more hope humanly speaking, and their need for assistance is pressing. Before God, there is no life, no part of life, that is not worthy of being lived. Since this life is in preparation for the next which will never end, we do not know what God wants from these people of his

The program also featured entertainment. Here we see Liliana Cosi and Marinel Stefanescu who performed a classical ballet piece. Between them is Carlo Casini, member of the Parliament of Europe and leader of the Movement for Life.

even in the very last moments of their lives. For us, therefore, euthanasia is a very serious contradiction in terms.

We must love, then. We must love, love, and love, because life, every life and every stage of life, calls for love. We must build a civilization of life in opposition to the civilization of death. Yes, today the world which often languishes in fear of life, which actively tries to suppress life, is in need of love. Today the world urgently needs an invasion of love: among the members of our families; among all families; among the members of secular and religious associations; among all Christians; among those of different religions, and among all people of good will—everywhere, in offices, hospitals, schools and factories; among children, young people and adults.

When God came on earth, he brought love. He, the Creator of life and the cause of a new life even more important, knew what was needed to maintain it: love was needed. And at the end of our lives, he himself will judge us exclusively on love. Therefore, love is certainly important.

Let us leave this stadium with the proposal to make our lives one continuous act of love towards every neighbor and to communicate this ardent desire to as many people as possible. In this way, we will give our contribution to that civilization so frequently mentioned today: the civilization of love.

Chiara Lubich

1) A member of Parliament and a distinguished Catholic writer, Igino Giordani was the first married focolarino.

God loves the unborn

In her address Mother Teresa directed everyone's attention to Mary, mother "so full of love." "Let's stop for a moment of prayer," she said, "for our parents, because they loved us, wanted us, because they gave us life. In the Gospel we read that God so loved the world that he gave us Jesus through the Virgin most pure. And when Mary went to serve her cousin who was expecting a baby, Elizabeth's unborn child leapt for joy within her. How marvelous it is that almighty God chose an unborn child to announce the coming of his Son! Today the unborn child is a target of death" and yet, she said "that unborn child was created for great things: to love and be loved....

"In Scripture, God says, 'Even if a mother forgets her child, I will not forget you.... I carried you in the palm of my hand, you are precious to me; I will love you. I called you by name, you are mine....'

"Let's look at this tender love of God for all of us, for these unborn children, for you and me.

"I will never forget," she continued, "a man who came to me a few days ago and said, 'My only son is dying. The doctor prescribed a medicine that can be obtained only in England.' While we were talking, someone came with a chest of medicine and right on top was the exact medicine that this man needed. Looking at that chest of medicine I thought, 'How many millions of children there are in the world and yet God has time to take care of this one child'...."

Mother Teresa went on to speak of those already born, of the poor, of the neglected, and referred several times to the commandment of love.

"Where does this love begin? In our families, in our homes....

"To make it easier for us to love one another Jesus said, 'Whatever you do to the least you do to me.... If you receive a child in my name, it is me that you receive. If you give even a glass of water in my name, you give it to me.' When we will be before the throne of God we will have to answer for these things:, 'I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was naked and you clothed me.' To be naked doesn't mean only to be without clothing. It also means to be without human dignity. Not to have a roof over our head doesn't mean only a house made of brick. It means not to be cared for, to be left out of the mainstream of society, to be an outcast.

"This is the love that Jesus brought on earth. This is the love that we must show to everyone. Why? Because he has first loved us." □

FAMILY LIFE

Weakened family life is one of the greatest social ills of our time.
The "New Family" Movement has as its aim to bring the Focolare spirit of unity into family life, so that each family will be deeply united within itself and with other families.

THE CHALLENGE OF A SPECIAL MOMENT

PART IV

We continue our series of articles on a particular phase of family life, that is, dealing with young adults at the time when they are exerting their independence in the struggle to find themselves and their place in the world. They sort out and test the values passed on to them and it is not unusual for them to find it difficult to communicate across the abyss of an entire generation. In this issue a couple of the New Family Movement, Tom and Mary Hartmann, share how they face these challenges.

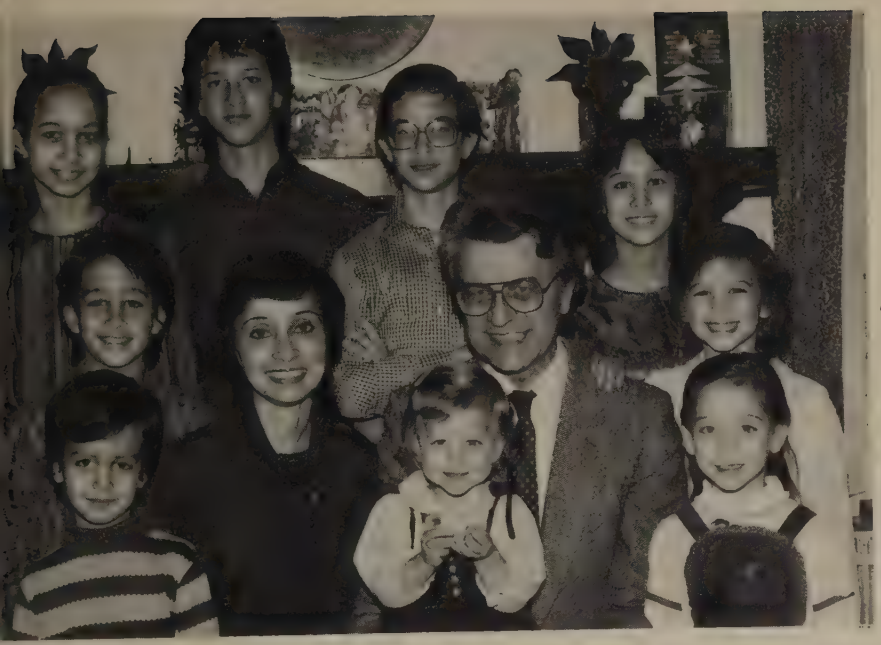
Compiled by PHYLLIS SCARINGE

Tom: Our friends who have teenage children tell us they can't wait till their children are out of their teens. They are hard to understand and difficult to control. They are characteristically hypersensitive. When disciplined, they feel alienated, when they are offered help, they reject it. This is what our friends tell us and we experience these things ourselves. So when Mary and I say that we enjoy this period with our children the most, our friends think we are crazy. It seems logical to us, though, that the more our children mature and especially the more they grow in the spirituality of unity of the Focolare, the more it is a joy for us.

Our youngest, Mark, was just born this June bringing the number of our children to ten. The oldest four are now teenagers. Tommy is 17 and he just graduated from high school: Christina is 16 and will be a senior, Peter is 15 and will be a junior, and Jennie who just graduated from junior high school is 13 years old.

I think that one of the reasons why we trust our teenagers and feel comfortable with them is that they talk to us enough that we know them and know what they're doing when they are not with us. For instance, when they go to a rock concert or a party, they often sit down afterwards with us and spontaneously talk about the things that took place. They know that we are interested and will try to listen without criticizing. This gives us confidence, too, to let them go out because we know that they are open with us and will tell us what they are doing. They most likely don't tell us everything but enough to give us confidence in their judgement so that we don't feel we have to overprotect them.

Mary: Recently I had an experience with one of the boys. I felt he was not communicating; he was being a little bit of a loner, cutting himself off. He's at the stage where there is a tendency to do that. Although he usually likes to be sociable



The Hartmann family. Mark, born in June of 1986, is the only one missing. Tom says, "When Mary and I say that we enjoy this period (the teen years) with our children the most, our friends think we are crazy."

and be with his friends, during this period he tended to be quiet and withdrawn.

I feel that my role as a mother is to be here in the family and observe what the kids are going through, whether they tell me or not, and to spot certain problem times. If I notice that one of them is cutting him or herself off from the family, I immediately talk it over with Tom so that in unity we decide what to do about it. In fact, I think the crucial thing for us is that we do talk things over in unity; we try to maintain mutual love and be detached from our own point of view so that we can better understand what God wants in any given circumstance.

In this case we decided on our approach. It doesn't come spontaneously to me to initiate a conversation like this but I found an opportunity to tell him that we noticed he is going through some difficulty and since we cared very much about him I'd like to know what's going on in his life. I think that having someone reach out to him like that, helped him tremendously. I noticed such a difference afterward. He wanted to love in return. He made the effort to come out of himself and be more communicative.

Sometimes I hesitate to approach them because I would like the children to come out and tell me things without my prodding. It's better if the initiative comes from them, but at the same time I think there are moments when they do need help. They need to know that we care, that we notice if something is wrong or changed in their behavior and that we want to help them.

It's a risk that each parent has to take. We could at times speak before they are ready and they might refuse to talk.

Tom: Mary made a very important point before which cannot be overemphasized. The unity between us, our communication, is the essential foundation for communication with the kids. When we try to maintain harmony and charity with each other and we try to communicate fully, the children see this and they in turn do it even when they don't feel like it. They understand that that is a basic part of the way our family lives. We do things in unity. That makes a big impact on them. Also, since Mary and I try to be open with each other perhaps there isn't the stress and conflict between us that can aggravate teenagers' problems. I remember when our oldest son was just entering his teens. He would challenge his mother. He used to say things, kiddingly, about all the girls that there are in the family and I would join him. Sometimes we would go too far. I realized that a father and son can separate themselves from the mother and even imply that she does not understand a man's world. (A mother and daughter can do this as well.) I saw that this can be destructive. If I encourage a buddy-buddy relationship with my son, taking sides with him rather than my wife I undercut the central unity of the family. I realized that before every other relationship I had to have harmony with my wife.

Another thing that has had constructive results in the family has been to ask the older boys to work with me when I'm painting and fixing things ►

Recently one of the boys was being a little bit of a loner. Having someone reach out to him helped him tremendously. He made the effort to come out of himself and love in return.

around the house. I feel I have the obligation to take the time to teach them these skills and, at the same time, to help them assume part of the responsibility for running our home.

For several years I have been working with my oldest son. He's very handy and so he has learned to do many, many things, sometimes even better than I can. That's a little hard for me to accept because I see him going ahead of me, but, on the other hand, it's also a great joy because he has very good ideas and I can work with him as a real partner.

Last summer, my second son started working with us too. We painted the outside of the house together. One of the conditions the boys laid down, in a kind of joking way, was that they couldn't work unless they listened to rock music. At first, I felt that I couldn't possibly agree to that. I found their music intolerable. But then I thought to myself: "I have to try to make myself one with them." So I said "All right, let's listen to rock music." They chose a tape that they thought would be least offensive to my generation and put the speaker out on the window sill close to where we were working. After a few hours of listening to that music and especially to their comments about the lyrics and the musicians, I began to understand why they liked it. I was even learning to like it myself. After that experience, I now have a certain appreciation of rock music. My sons were very happy with the thought that they had converted their "old man." My younger son felt that as I was teaching him how to paint, he and his brother were teaching me about music. He was able to do the trim around the windows, which was the most tedius part of the job, and he did it very well. Working with them made me very happy because the unity between us seemed to grow deeper and produced something quite creative.

It's hard for a parent to let the children make their own mistakes. One very small example that I can recall was when my older son and I were making a go-cart for the younger children. I wanted to make it in a certain way and he wanted to do it another way. I let him do it his way but it didn't turn out as well as I had hoped. But the fact that I let him make it his way was a great encouragement for him.

After showing him how to take apart and fix bicycles, I urged him to do it himself. After a short while, he learned to repair bicycles better than I could. If I didn't give him the freedom to experiment and had I insisted on doing it myself I would not only be spending all my time fixing bicycles but he would never have taken the initiative to learn as much as he could about fixing them. Now the neighborhood children come to ask him to fix their bikes. I must admit that while learning, he did certain things that I didn't like. For example, he took apart my bicycle and rebuilt it according to his own taste. He replaced the original green fenders with silver ones that looked terrible to me. It was a part of his learning to fix bicycles.... I had to ride the bicycle with silver fenders for a while.

With regard to authority, though, Mary and I do believe that we have to decide first how firm we should be or how flexible we should be and once we decide together, we insist that the children follow. If they don't, then we do punish them. The main thing is that we decide together because at times I can to be too severe and at other times Mary can be. When we make a joint deci-

sion we feel that we give a punishment that is out of love rather than anger.

We make mistakes too. For example, I've said in anger to one of our teenagers: "You're grounded this week!" for not doing what we had asked. Afterwards I realized that he didn't really deserve it. Then I had to have the courage to say, "I'm sorry. I gave you a punishment that you didn't deserve." It's very important for them to see that when we make mistakes we know how to begin all over again.

I remember another experience that I had with Jennie. Once when I was serving ice cream I asked several times who wanted some and then served those who responded. After I put the icecream back into the freezer, Jennie who is 13, said, "I wanted ice cream too!" So I said, "That's too bad, you didn't answer me when I asked who wanted ice cream. Now you'll have to get it yourself." Jennie felt quite hurt and Mary intervened explaining that Jennie had asked for ice cream but I hadn't heard her. And the other children confirmed it. So then I had to apologize to Jennie, which as a parent I find hard to do because I instinctively feel that I have to maintain my authority as father of the family. Yet I do fail and make mistakes. I am sometimes tempted to remain silent or to try to cover it up by being busy with something else. But I know if I do that, the kids know I'm being dishonest. The only way is to apologize.

The best way for them to know that I really love them is to be honest with them and ask their forgiveness. I always remember an experience that I had with my father when I was a teenager. He once got intoxicated and embarassed my mother and me in front of all our relatives. The next day when I got home from school he was painting my bedroom. He was painting on his knees and he stayed on his knees and asked my forgiveness; he said that it would never happen again. It was such an overwhelming experience for me. I realized how much he loved me. I felt proud of him and felt I had the best dad in the world. I'm often reminded of that scene when I am tempted to worry about my "dignity" before my own children.

Another time, when Christina was being strongly corrected by her grandmother, I thought that she was being wrongly treated and I began to defend her. Christina started crying and went to her room. I assumed that she went to her room because of what grandma had said to her. A little while later Mary came down from

(Continued on page 28)

I see the children's reaction when I impose my authority. They don't give love anymore. I produce the opposite effect.

MARIAPOLIS LUMINOSA

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The official inauguration will take place on September 14, 1986 at Mariapolis Luminosa in Hyde Park, New York.

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SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT!!

Two special issues of Living City are in the making:

1. The October issue, will feature excerpts of Chiara's writings and information on her life and the Movement's developments as we welcome her back to New York after many years.
2. The November issue will provide coverage of the inauguration.

If you wish to receive a copy, or if you are a subscriber and want an extra copy of either or both of these issues, reserve now by using the coupon below and send it with your payment to: Living City, P.O. Box 126, Jamaica, New York 11415.

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WORK AND THE EMERGING LAITY

By ANTONIO MARIA BAGGIO

As humanism spread throughout Europe, work and lifestyles underwent radical change. The Christian concept of work developed and made strides that still influence our society today.

Who does time belong to? "To God," said people in the Middle Ages, "and therefore it must not be used for personal gain as the merchants do, who buy at a price today and resell at a higher price tomorrow."

In the Middle Ages, worktime was measured by the day. Here, too, the monks were the teachers: with their church bells they announced the canonical hours of prayer, the time for meals or for resting. It was a time division substantially following that of the Romans (the third, sixth, ninth hour) as we all know from the story of Christ's passion.

It was the time kept by the Church, and all of society observed it. But little by little another bell began to be heard in the city to mark the work periods. Particularly in the textile workers' sector, where the wages made up an essential part of the production costs, precision in regulating the working day had become imperative. This was a different time from the ecclesiastical one. It was foreshadowing the technological era of the clock and expanding the presence of a new social category, the overlords of industry and their vision of time. It was around these very bells (and their marking of work time) that the workers' rebellions were organized in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when the call bells for work were silenced and turned into summonses for meetings or uprisings. Next to the era of the Church as timekeeper now came that of the city and the time schedule of the merchant.

The mechanical arts

Virtue, in the eyes of the Renaissance person, no longer had anything monastic about it, at least according to Palmieri, a historian of the mid fifteenth century who decried those who lived in solitude and did not directly participate in the areas of concern of the majority. He exalted the different forms of human activity which were aimed more at better living than spiritual development. The human arts, in his view, were the "mechanical arts," the art of doing. Palmieri's view of work which reflected his times would have sent shivers of disgust down the spine of medieval intellectuals.

For the building of a well-ordered society Palmieri, in accordance with the fast-spreading modern mentality of the time, did not appeal to the Church's authority or beneficence, but relied on human capacity alone. "Industry has embellished and ordered our way of life," he wrote. "It has given rise to cities which are inhabited and visited by multitudes of people; laws have been drawn up, civil customs and traditions have been approved, all the disciplines of political life put in order. From this have followed peacefulness of heart, and unity of persons

gathered together. Thus the Stoics' words are proved true: that 'all on earth is created by God for our common use and convenience, and that we have been generated in order to be useful to others so that together we may help one another to our mutual benefit."

The idea of a social body and of mutual usefulness that permeates Palmieri's thought was nothing other than a lay expression of the concept of the Mystical Body, the most Christian of concepts which the Church conveyed to the general mentality but which Palmieri, faithful to the classicist spirit of his time, attributed to the Stoics, who professed a similar concept but were animated by an entirely different spirit. Palmieri did not attribute this concept of social body to the Church—to which he however belonged—perhaps because he thought that only lay persons like himself could make it attractive and dynamic.

The realities of the new society which the lay people, Christians and non-Christians alike, were building, often assumed an anti-Christian tone.

Even Thomas More spoke out against certain influences not always evangelical that had entered the Church during the middle ages. "How many among the masses of priests and religious do not work? The rich and the high-born have their numerous servants...."

An army of vagabonds

These were problems the Council of Trent would have to face. Already, however, there were forces of change at work on the part of many institutions, which rose in the Church between the 16th and 17th centuries, and which animated the so-called "Catholic Reform." There rose new religious orders like the Jesuits, devoted to the teaching and education of the Catholic laity, to assure a Christian presence in society. In addition to the Jesuits who were entrusted mostly with the education of a high social class, there were foundations which opened schools to the poor whose number gave no sign of diminishing. The 16th and 17th centuries were plagued by continuous wars with the inevitable consequences of poverty and pestilence. The roads of Europe were covered with streams of the destitute who were doomed to an appalling existence. Refugees of various types, deserters, mercenaries, veterans of disbanded armies, the band of person who provided for and followed the armies, prostitutes, cripples and the blind from the beggars' organizations, the unemployed, people running away from debt, scoundrels, false monks and false pilgrims, and people of a thousand different miseries mingled with travelling artisans, true pilgrims, and seasonal workers, in a continuous, often desperate flow of humanity.

One nightmare was shared by all—hunger. In the intellectual city of Padua in 1529, we learn from the Bolognese historian Giovan Battista Segni that "every morning we found 25 to 30 starved bodies in the streets, heaped on the garbage pile. The poor had no human resemblance."

No public structures were adequate to meet the thousands of needs to be attended to. It was the Christian initiative which intervened to provide for these needs. There were groups of religious and lay people to care for the sick, prostitutes, visit those in jail, defend the causes of poor defendants, liberate those in debtors' prison, accompany those condemned to death, whose burials were paid for by confraternities. There were even those who provided funds for destitute girls' dowries, and devoted their time to teach children how to read, and write, and teach catechism to children. During the time of Saint Charles Borromeo there were 700 such schools in Milan alone.

The clerics and the laymen

There were events to indicate that the activities of lay people were not always immediately understood by the Church of the time. Angela Merici and her companions, for instance, wished to devote themselves to the ►

moral and religious education of women and to help those who, either because they were orphans or had gone astray, lived at the margins of society. They did not live in a convent but rather remained with their families and in society. They were eventually obliged to embrace the traditional forms of consecration by taking the veil and living behind walls.

A similar fate was met by Jean di Chantal and her companions. They wanted to follow the example of Mary when she visited Elizabeth intending by that to help the poor and the sick without making any particular vows or living in seclusion but they, too, had to pass through the doors of a convent.

A few years later, however, Vincent de' Paul and Louise de Marillac were successful in gaining acceptance for a new style of religious life for women. The "Daughters of Charity" could be seen everywhere—on the battle fields nursing the wounded, in the back alleys of Paris seeking out abandoned children and derelicts. Thus a little at a time, these new needs of the Catholic laity found their expression in the Church.

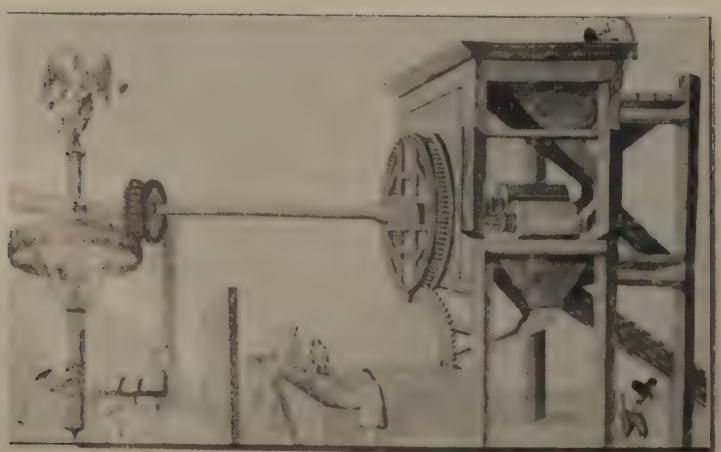
Calvin and work

John Calvin, the reformer from Geneva, left a noteworthy and dynamic imprint on the social thought of his era. He was convinced that God, in the course of historial events, was accomplishing a great plan throughout the centuries to which man is called to collaborate with his whole being. Work, therefore, was not a means to reach selfish, personal power, (for in doing so man would rely on his own self); instead it was a way for man, transformed by grace, to in turn, transform his own historical context and collaborate with God in leading creation to its ultimate goal. It was a strong stimulus to diligence in work which undoubtedly contributed to the development of western individualism, the attitude of the untiring and upright entrepreneur who re-invests his earnings not to accumulate an usurer's fortune but to create productive capital.

This individualism was one of the possible consequences of what the Calvinists' understood by their personal responsibility before God. It is by no means a license to enter just any kind of enterprise. The root of their industriousness, insofar as it is Christian, is profoundly communitarian; the "talents" that everyone must put to use are nothing more than the total patrimony of the gifts received from God which must circulate and bring fruit, "so that there may be reciprocal sharing among men."

It is a discourse easily exposed to great risks, for the moment the religious impulse weakens, solidarity disappears and the entrepreneurial capacity, which includes the power to organize other people's work does not alone guarantee the common good. The nearing Industrial Revolution would demonstrate this. There will be people who would identify the religious dynamism of the circulation of talents with the circulation of ideas and goods carried out by the new industrial system, thus giving religious justification to capitalism which was itself alien to Calvin's thinking. He had, in fact, often intervened in defense of the workers of Geneva against the proprietors and authorities.

However, imposing a certain social justice through the authoritarian government of little Geneva was one thing, and establishing moral control of the new production forces on a European or worldwide scale was another. Fairly soon these forces would have no need for any religious support and



Machines came into use and, even though animals or water provided the power source, production increased tremendously. The age of feudalism was left behind.

The port of Cartagena in Colombia. Navigation brought the old and new worlds together. In Latin America, the Europeans imposed extremely harsh working conditions which, together with the military conquest and the diseases imported from the old continent, wiped out entire ethnic groups. Such brutality was often opposed by the missionaries who wrote in defense of the Indians.

would, eventually, manipulate and use religion to justify itself. Later, in the 19th and 20th centuries, the ranks of reformed Christianity would give rise to a reawakening where solidarity would have greater value than the spirit of enterprise.

The social body

And the Catholics?

Their deep involvement with social problems through works of charity gave many bishops, who often had organized them, the opportunity to speak out on the problems of labor, not only with a general theological competence but with a knowledge of fact. Doctrine did not undergo any substantial change in regard to the tradition which by then was well established. There was emphasis on the mutual obligation to honesty between workers and owners, and also on the character of service which wealth should have.

A Bishop Gregorio Musso, in the mid 16th century, considered all wealth-producing activity, including trade, to be legitimate as long as the cause of justice was saved. He severely criticized the use of lending on usury, but the loans he referred to were not those involving productive use of capital, but rather the small emergency loans forced upon the poor. The social enviroment of this bishop (which was involved in the Mediterranean economy which by that time had lost all strategic importance), was very different, for example, from the Calvinistic one where any mention of loans was spontaneously associated with investment.

The economic climate was different in the Milanese enviroment of Charles Borromeo who, in discussing the matter in detail, forbade any kind of fraud in the various types of commerce and work contracts. He also forbade the hiring of those who didn't practice any religion, of people who swore or gave scandal, and he ordered that all places of work be put under the protection of a saint. It was a series of decrees that may seem suffocating to our eyes, since they exercise religious control over civil activities (as was practiced in Calvin's time in Geneva, as well). It was a rule we no longer accept but at the time it worked in favor of labor—in defining what were "just salaries," in prohibiting work on holidays, etc.

The basic idea emerging from the social thinking of the Church as expressed by many bishops, was that we must help those in need because all are part of the same Body of Christ.

In conclusion, this belonging to the same body which had prompted Calvin to encourage work and to organize it as a means of sharing, led many Catholic bishops to protect especially those who had been excluded or harmed by its very organization. Neither the Protestant reformers nor the Catholics had drawn a line between a spirit of enterprise and solidarity, at least not intentionally, because both were part of the common Christian heritage. It is true, however, that the two concepts were given different weight not only because of the different theological orientations but also because the requirements of the social enviroments changed from one time to another. It almost seems that during the Reformation, the Church split in the effort to remain incarnated in a world that was about to be torn asunder. And this seems to suggest that, by building unity among them, the Christians of our day could bring unity even to the divided world into which they were born.

Antonio Maria Baggio

Economy and work

A drop of oil in a big machine

I work as a manager in an office that has responsibility for enforcing the Government's Equal Employment Opportunity laws in the work environment. For the most part, I enjoy my work as I have many opportunities to interact with both the employees and the supervisors of our organization. However, because of the type of work that we are involved in, I have met many difficulties and I have found in the three years of employment in this area, that I must continually remind myself to love Jesus in everyone I meet. But there are times when this is difficult and find myself caught between a frustrated employee and an unhappy supervisor—each one looking to our office to settle a problem.

One of the laws which we monitor prohibits discrimination against a person over the age of 40. To avoid problems in this area, we have made a special effort to train our supervisors and managers; particularly in interviewing techniques to avoid having them ask questions that may be misinterpreted. Still mistakes are made, sometimes intentionally and other times unintentionally. The end result is the same. We end up with an employee whose morale goes down and a supervisor who must defend his position.

About three months ago, a colleague of mine transferred to another office and I was given many of his projects to complete. One of these, was a case where a woman claimed that she had been discriminated against because of her age. She said that discrimination had occurred when she was interviewed for a position, the interviewer had asked her certain questions that led to believe that "age" had been a deciding factor in her nonselection for the job. By the time I got involved in this particular case, the incident was already over a year old, and several steps had already been taken. Although everyone who had reviewed the case felt that the interview had been conducted improperly they were not convinced that discrimination had occurred. The argument was that, this person might not have been selected anyway. While we did not disagree with this rationale, our office felt that something now needed to be done so that both the employee and the agency came out "ahead" in this situation. A proposal had been made that she be given an opportunity to be interviewed for a similar position ahead of her peers. If it was determined that she qualified for the job, then she would be selected. If she were not selected then the selecting official had to document why she was not selected. This seemed like a fair solution. Because the employee had to qualify for the job, it was not just going to be handed to her. A settlement was written up, and according to my former colleague, everyone was in agreement. The employee was told that an agreement had been reached and that she should apply for a certain position. Here is where I entered the picture.

My supervisor had instructed me to follow-up on the case. I learned that communications had broken down somewhere in the negotiations. Management indicated that they had never reached an agreement on this. The employee had gone for an interview only to find out that "management" had not lived up to their part of the agreement. Back in the office I could not locate a copy of an agreement—in fact all I could find was a draft copy that contained many errors. A very upset employee was in my office and I was not in a position to give her any concrete information. It was a moment for me to embrace Jesus Forsaken.

Now we had to start the negotiations from scratch. A new job was identified. My boss and I met with the Director of one of our laboratories, with the Personnel Officer, and with a manager who had a position that he was trying to fill to see if we could all agree on a course of action. There was much heated discussion. Management felt that if they went ahead with the proposed action, they would lose face and that it would set a precedent for other employees to complain. They also pointed to the fact that "discrimination" had not legally been found and that after all what went on in the interview was between the supervisor and the employee. One person's word against the other. Still the Director acknowledged that this employee was a very dedicated, hard-working person and deserved a chance to move up in the

system. But he was not convinced that our intervention was necessary.

As I sat listening to the discussion around the table. I felt convinced that I had to love the people around me even if they did not agree with our position. Yet, I also felt that I needed to let them know how I felt. So I told them that even without taking into consideration the legal aspect of the matter we all agreed that here we had a good employee, who felt she had been discriminated against. If we ignored the situation, she was going to continue to be unhappy and this would affect her performance. She also would communicate her unhappiness to her fellow employees, and that she had the option, which she most likely would exercise, to go to a higher level for a decision. This not only would be costly but would consume the time and energy of many people. The human thing to do, I said, was to go ahead with this action which would not take anything away from the Agency and in fact would show that management cared about its employees; we could all be winners.

We continued to discuss the matter for a few more minutes. Then the Director said he was willing to go ahead with the settlement we had proposed. The other manager and Personnel Officer also agreed. My supervisor then told me to begin to write a new agreement. This was done. The next day I showed the paper to one of our lawyers to make sure it was okay. We then met with the employee. She was very happy with the results and quickly signed the agreement. The next thing was to obtain the signature of the people who had been involved in the meeting. This was easy until I got to the Director who had been in such agreement the day before. He kept the paper for two days and then called and told me he was not going to sign. He had been speaking to his Boss who had directed him not to sign because he said he had already told our office several months ago that this action was unacceptable. This came as a surprise to me because I had never been involved in a discussion with him. It turned out this discussion had occurred before I took over the case.

We were back at square one. The application was returned to the employee by the personnel department. At this point she came to see me and was very angry—to the point where she would not even listen to what I had to say. She said she felt very bitter; that she could trust no one; that she had believed in social justice before this, but this experience had shattered her belief. She said our office was all for management and she no longer had any faith in us. I tried to get her to calm down. But she was very agitated. I promised that we would start again to see if we could arrive to a solution.

Next we met with the Director's boss to see what had happened. We were in his office for about two hours. He said that while he felt in his heart that the interviewer might have erred, he was not about to make any concessions. I found myself getting really upset at this man. At a certain point I thought, "Whatsoever you do to the least...," there was Jesus to be loved in him too. I had to give him my total attention—listen to what he had to say. At the conclusion of the two hours, he said he would agree to go ahead with the agreement if his advisors (the people who had agreed previously) told him to do so. The next day we were finally able to go ahead.

Not all is concluded yet. We have now run into another snag. But this one I think we can work through. I have had another meeting with the employee. I told her that we have not yet arrived at a decision but that we have not forgotten her. She smiled, when I said this, and said "I'm sorry I was so upset. As long as I know you are working on it, as long as you tell me you are working on the case even if you don't have anything resolved yet, at least I am getting some feedback. Now I have to wait, but I have a feeling that things will work out."

It was a small experience, a drop of love, a drop of oil, you can call it in a big machine, which needs oil to make its wheels run smoothly.

My confidence lies in the fact that there are many other "drops" in different points, at different moments, which will help the wheels run better and faster and for the good of humanity!

F.C.

HOW TO STOP TIME

At one time or another we have all wished we could stop time. Speaking to a group of children years ago Chiara Lubich shared with them a solution she found: "to live the present moment well, with all one's heart, mind, soul and strength, letting go of everything that is not the will of God thereby making of each action a beautifully wrapped package presentable to God."

"Today" is a column in which we share experiences reflecting the efforts of people to live this experience of making the most of the moments which fill the day. They just might help us all to live days that will remain forever.

I went to see a friend this evening who is also studying to take an exam. I went to pick up a book from her that I needed to return to another friend. I was trying to do these errands in a hurry. I realized I wouldn't have time for dinner. But this friend was worried about her exam, so I stopped to give her some encouragement. This took some time so I told her I would stop back to her house to see if she needed anything before taking the bus home. Then I went to return the book I had borrowed. When I returned to her house she had ordered in food and invited me to dinner. This turned out to be the love of God and the hundredfold for me because I had dinner and still made the bus on time. She was also very happy because she found the encouragement she needed to continue studying.

A.G.

Recently, after driving eleven hours on a trip I was extremely tired by the time I went to bed at midnight. I no sooner had fallen asleep when my daughter woke up crying with an ear ache. She had been on medication for two days and I just couldn't inderstand why it was still hurting her. As a result I wasn't very sympathetic and when she gagged on the Tylenol I gave her for the pain I lost my patience. I was pretty irritated and had a hard time getting back to sleep. It wasn't long before my little boy woke up crying. The first time it happened I got up and very lovingly got him back to sleep but by the third time I yelled at him to be quiet and go to sleep. After that I was unable to sleep and it finally dawned on me that I had made a choice in life to love God more and serve him in my neighbor and I was turning my back on him. Fortunately he gave me another chance. This time when my daughter woke up I could respond with love. Instead of getting upset all I could think of was to show her my love and not let her get upset for making a mess. When I got back in bed I felt great joy and peace.

A.H

Yesterday I started to panic about an upcoming exam. At the same time my girlfriend called me also in a state of frenzy because of her exam. Not only was she upset about her exam but it seemed that nothing was going right for her that day. I forgot about my own worries to listen to her. I was able to console her and tell her that she needed to take things one at a time and one day at a time.

My words came so naturally, that it sounded like what Jesus would want to say to both of us. She was so happy because she really wanted to be listened to and to hear a good pep talk. In the end I was very happy, too, because it was as if Jesus was also giving me a pep talk about living the present moment, and about putting others before myself. In the end I found the answers to my own questions and peace in my soul that God is taking care of me.

G.A.

WORD OF LIFE

AUGUST

"Let us ... persevere in running the race which lies ahead; let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who inspires and perfects our faith."

(Hebrews 12:1-2)

To grasp the depth of this word of life we should link it to the preceding verse: "Therefore since we for our part are surrounded by this cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every encumbrance of sin which clings to us and persevere in running the race which lies ahead; let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who inspires and perfects our faith."

The apostle was speaking to a group of Christians whose faith was strongly put to the test by the persecutions waged against them. They had begun to show signs of giving in, because—as we all know—when a trial is lengthy there arises the danger that one might begin to doubt the love of God and abandon the struggle.

St. Paul used the example of a sports contest, an imagery dear to him, in order to encourage them on. We are like athletes who compete in a track meet and just as there are spectators in the stands who cheer on one or the other runner, we too, are surrounded by countless spectators. The spectators here are all those who have already overcome the trials of faith. They are the great figures of history and salvation to whom—for us of the modern day—should be added those champions of the faith, the saints, who have preceded us. They now watch over and sustain us from heaven. They are not the usual well-wishers who offer encouraging words; they are witnesses, brothers and sisters in faith, who have victoriously gone through our same trials and by their example urge us on.They give us the certainty that we, too, can reach the finish line.

"Let us ... persevere in running the race which lies ahead; let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who inspires and perfects our faith."

We can continue to use the imagery of sports. If we who are involved in this spiritual race want to reach the goal there are three things we must do.

First, in order to run swiftly we need to free ourselves from all useless baggage, meaning all the clutter of this world that can get in our way, as well as our ties to sin.

Secondly, we need perseverance, that is endurance, the capacity to hang on which comes from the conviction that God is with us, with his grace, and from the decision to want to finish.

But, most of all, we need to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who preceded us and leads us. He is our model. Scripture tells us he is the one who "inspires and perfects our faith" because he stirred up the faith in us and with the glory he has attained he enables us to touch the crown of faith. He did not choose an easy, comfortable life while on earth but rather a life similar to our own. Like us he was tested, like us he lived the human experience in suffering and difficulties and in particular through the great trial of the cross and abandonment. His unshakable trust in the love of the Father, however, never wavered. He remained faithful to the end and by so doing, reached the goal.

"Let us ... persevere in running the race which lies ahead; let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who inspires and perfects our faith."

This word of life calls our attention to the meaning of trials.

We should be convinced that trials are indispensable for our growth as Christians. They help us reach the goal to which the Father calls us. We cannot do without trials if the light of the word of God is to become flesh in us and become the substance of our whole life. This is why God sends them to us.

Trials that have been overcome give greater depth and consistency to our life. We should, therefore, persevere through trials. This will be possible if our gaze will be always fixed on Jesus, and primarily on him crucified and forsaken. Love for him will lead us to embrace trials one after the other, oftentimes without our even realizing that they are real trials. With our gaze fixed on Jesus crucified and forsaken we can overcome discouragement and the slackening of our will, and courageously begin over and over again after having stopped or fallen.

Let us go swiftly ahead, then, with perseverance, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus crucified and forsaken.

Chiara Lubich

WORD OF LIFE

SEPTEMBER

"There is rejoicing among the angels of God over one repentant sinner."
(Luke 15:10)

The word makes us live.

The word makes us free.

The word guarantees happiness.

The word converts.

The word purifies us.

The word draws us to our specific vocations.

The word brings forth the hatred of the world and the sanctity of the disciple.

The word makes us see the truth.

The word brings comfort.

The word gives us joy.

The word produces works.

The word gives wisdom.

The word preserves us from human concerns.

The word obtains everything.

The word brings about union with God.

The word gives us hope of eternal life.

The word makes us one.

The word changes one's mentality.

The word makes each soul a heaven.

"There is rejoicing among the angels of God over one repentant sinner."

Jesus welcomed publicans and sinners with love and accepted their invitations to dinner. To invite a person to dinner, just like accepting an invitation to dinner, was a sign of great friendship. By this gesture Jesus wanted to show that no barriers existed between himself and these people. Some of Jesus' contemporaries, however, were upset by his behavior because they saw it as destroying the sharp separation that they thought God would maintain between the righteous and the sinner.

It was in response to this and to the criticism and accusations made against him that Jesus narrates three parables, the parables of mercy: the parable of the lost sheep, of the lost silver piece, and of the prodigal son. The second of these, concerning the lost coin, concludes with these words:

"There is rejoicing among the angels of God over one repentant sinner."

Through this parable Jesus wanted to help his critics understand the mind of God. God treats us the way a father treats his children. A father has infinite patience. He loves his child, first of all, because he is his own flesh and blood. Similarly, God loves us because he created us; we came from his heart. God's love goes much further beyond our weaknesses and our sins.

He wants to save all his children. Not only, but if he has any preferences, it is for those most in need. He is the first to act and seek out the child who has gone astray. His love is so entirely concentrated on that child that he gives the impression that no one else exists. He finds no peace until he has found his child again.

"There is rejoicing among the angels of God over one repentant sinner."

We can understand his joy over being able to once again embrace the child who was lost and to want everyone to celebrate with him. It would be useless to ask why; the question would show that we have not understood at all. There are no rational explanations for a father's love. The only explanation is that this is the way a father's love is.

Among the angels and saints of heaven—meaning there, where God's way of reasoning is perfectly understood—there is great celebrating when even one sinner returns to the Father. The same should happen among us, in the kingdom of heaven on earth.

"There is rejoicing among the angels of God over one repentant sinner."

This word of life has two things to say to us.

First of all it is an invitation to understand God's way of

reasoning, to believe in his love. Inclined as we are to measure and calculate, at times we think that God's love for us is like that, too. We think that God could tire of us and say, "That's enough"! Instead Jesus wants to make us understand that God's logic is not like ours. God awaits us always. Not only, but we give him immense joy every time (even if it is an infinite number of times) we return to him.

Secondly Jesus wants to extend another invitation: an invitation to participate in God's celebration.

We must put aside all presumption and spiritual pride that lead us to judge and discriminate against our neighbor, and celebrate his or her return. We can celebrate, most of all, the victories of the love of God. As for us, we participate in God's celebration when, instead of dwelling on our past, we entrust our failures and lack of correspondence to his love and put ourselves to work for his kingdom announcing the gospel of his mercy.

"There is rejoicing among the angels of God over one repentant sinner."

We could be helped in living this word of life by reviving our faith in God's love for us and our neighbor. We should open—as God does—our heart toward those who have distanced themselves from him, reaching out toward those most in need.

Chiara Lubich

EXPERIENCES

The following are experiences in living the Gospel which some of our readers shared with us.

A family upheaval

My niece lives with us and pays me room and board. I know how easy it is to be attached to money and why family upheavals are caused because of this so I tried to be aware of this while delicately trying to help her.

Last week she told me that since she was going to go back to her mother's home next month she wouldn't have to pay me for the month. When I told her she was right except that if she stayed here over the month she would have to pay something for the time she stayed. She then became very angry. I tried to explain but it was of no use, she was upset.

The next evening unaware that I was reading in the living room, she phoned her mother and put everything I said in a bad light. I was hurt. While she was talking I realized she had no where to go so I tried to coax my family to let her stay on with us. Whenever she would get upset I consoled her, but I realized it wasn't enough. I thought of Jesus and of how he had asked the Father to forgive us. I knew I must forgive my niece. I phoned her mother back and told her that there would be no hard feelings between us. I went to my niece and told her I wasn't angry with her. She felt better as I tried to do little acts of love to restore the unity we once had. Then thinking of the Word of Life for February "Man does not live on bread alone," suddenly I didn't care anymore whether she gave me what she owed or not. I felt a great peace inside and was happy, and grateful to God that he had given me the grace to live the Word.

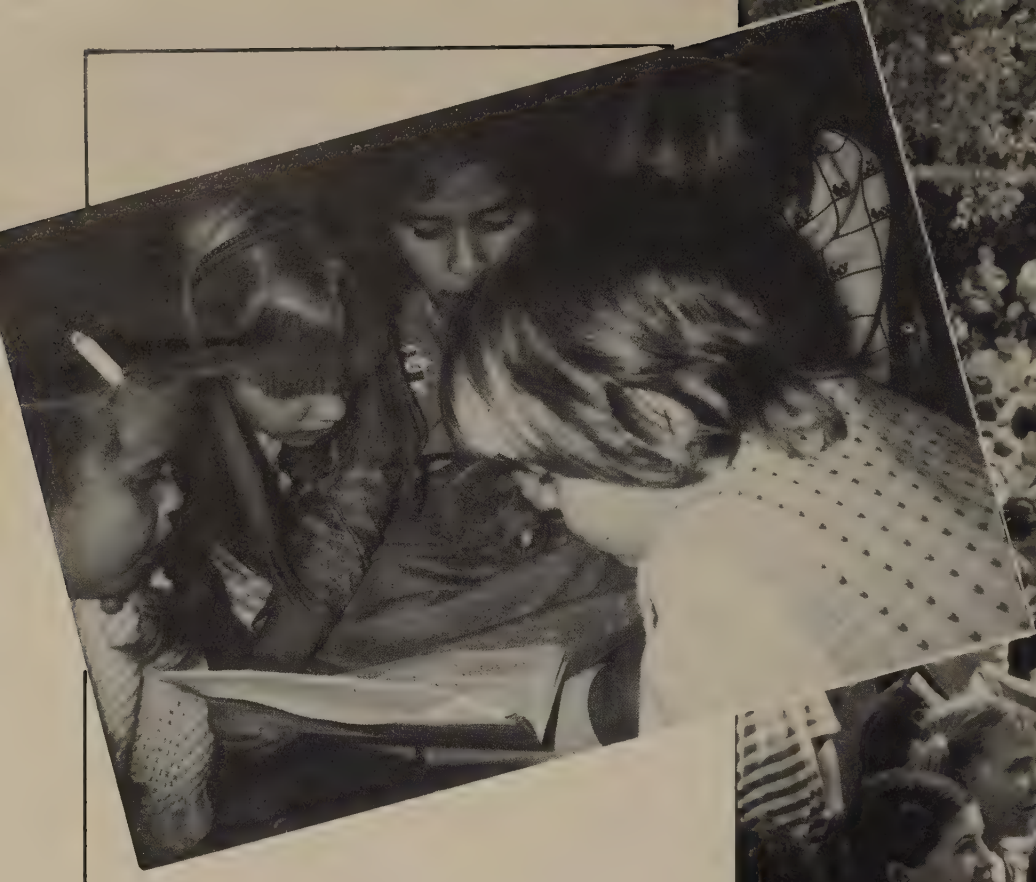
E.A.

No more "just in case"

After participating in one of our workshops where we spoke about the communion of goods and setting "your heart on his kingdom and these other things will be given you as well," I had an urgency to rid our home of excess accumulated from the "just in case" mentality. I had always more than one winter coat or jacket for each child, "just-in-case" one of them lost one, tore it, had it stolen, etc.

A week after all the extras went to others who might need them more than we, my daughter lost her coat. Immediately I caught myself thinking and said: "No! I had given them away because I trusted, and I knew I had to keep trusting. The next morning, I gave her my coat to wear for the day. That afternoon when I came home from work, there was a bag on our front porch. In it was a beautiful rabbit fur coat (which we could never have afforded) just my daughter's size. A neighbor, who knew nothing about the missing coat, had given it to us.

M.H.



It was about five o'clock and my dad wasn't home from work yet. My family had had a long day. We were very tired and I was bugging everyone and bothering them and, I would say, just getting into trouble. So that went on until my dad came home and I just wanted to go to my room and sulk. When I got to my room, I thought for a second, "I should try to love Jesus Forsaken[1] more." I ran out to the living room and started picking up books and then went over to my family and apologized. Then I started over and started helping everyone with what they had to do. For the rest of the evening, the house was peaceful and my family felt the difference.

1) Refers to the moment of Jesus on the cross when he cried out, "My God, my god, why have you forsaken me?"

A.Z.
age 11

I went to a new school this year and there were a lot of new people to meet. After one month in school, I had gotten to know most of the people in my classes. There was one girl I noticed who was very quiet and alone most of the time.

One day, I remembered the Word of Life, "Insofar as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me," and I thought I wouldn't leave Jesus by himself. That gave me the courage to go over and talk with her.

I started talking about sports, hobbies, and different subjects that we were taking in school. She began to share with me her interests; her likes and dislikes. I discovered that we really had a lot in common; in fact, we liked to do a lot of the same things.

Often when I would go to school I would find her sitting all by herself. It was hard for me to leave my group of friends and go over to her. Now, though, there is a real bond growing between us and it isn't hard at all anymore. She seems much happier, too, and is beginning to join in the activities at school.

L.C.
age 15

the young and the gospel

For Christmas I got a skateboard and I liked it a lot. I took good care of it and didn't let anybody use it. If I did let anyone use it, it was for no more than five minutes.

One day my brother brought his friend to stay over night. They decided to skateboard. My brother has a skateboard, but his friend did not. They asked me if I would lend him my skateboard. Although I've grown very attached to the skateboard, and I've always hoarded it, I realized that my brother and his friend were more important than my skateboard. I let them use it because I knew the skateboard wouldn't get me to heaven but my loving would.

J.Z.
age 14

(Continued from page 13)

Chrissy's room to say that she was not upset about what grandma had said to her but rather because of what I said to grandma. I realized I had to begin anew. I had to apologize first to grandma then to Christina who gave me a big hug. Then everything was fine.

Mary: Our asking forgiveness sets a good example for them, too, so that when they make a mistake, they have the courage to say I'm sorry and start over.

We were talking about punishment before. I found that we have to make it clear to the children that we punish them because we love them. Children can interpret punishment as disapproval of them as persons. They can interpret it to mean that we don't like them. "My mother's against me" or "my father's against me." So when I have to punish one of the children, I sometimes feel it's necessary to say: "I'm punishing you because I dislike what you did. I don't think what you did was right. But that doesn't mean that I don't love you." When I present corrections this way they are usually able to accept it well.

We try to base our relationships with one another on love. Then whenever difficulties, come up it is logical and normal to speak to the children in terms of loving. First of all, when I have to correct one of the children, I have to start with my own conversion, I know that I have to correct that mistake first in myself. There are times when I correct without thinking first, and it is not a correction that's made out of love. Then I have to go back and apologize and start over.

Tom: One thing that often comes up and is a little difficult to deal with especially because we have a large family is when the children say "It isn't fair" when someone gets something that they don't get, or one gets one kind of treatment and another gets a different kind. What I have come to realize though is that we can't really live in terms of what's fair. We have to live in terms of what is love for each other because if everything is based on what is "fair," and this kind of justice is the measure, then we would be constantly in petty squabbles over how much to give each child.

In order to love people we can't just treat them "fairly," we have to love each one individually. Some need a certain kind of attention, and others need a different kind of attention. So when the children say "it isn't fair" we say, "No, it isn't fair but is it love?" If it's love for this person it will be fair. Of course, if it's ice cream I try to give an equal scoop to each child. But if they say, after dinner when it comes time to clean up, that they washed the dishes last night, for example, and it isn't fair that they should have to do them again tonight, we say "It may not be fair but could it be the loving thing to do?" And "Is there justice without love?" One person may have a lot of homework and someone else may not. We appeal to their capacity to love.

Mary: We are always trying to learn from our mistakes. One of the difficulties we have—and I think this is typical with all teenagers—is in helping them to take care of their things. They have their own ideas. When I was a teenager I, too, had my own ideas on how I wanted my room set up and although it was fine for me it was a mess to my mother. Now I find myself going through the same thing my mother did with me. The children's idea of order and organization is certainly different from mine.

I often found myself getting upset with them. "You have to do it, and that's it!" But I noticed that when I ask them to straighten up their rooms—with love—or ask them to do it as an act of love for me, they respond. It is much more constructive than insisting they do it my way. I have to recognize that they have their own style and taste which is different from mine.

The tendency is always to impose, because we feel we are experienced. We know more. I've said it myself, "I'm your mother". It's true, I am their mother, but I still have to respect them, to love them the way God wants me to. I see the children's reaction when I use my authority like that, they don't give love anymore. I produce the opposite effect.

Underneath all this I feel I must have the basic guideline that the children are not our possessions; they have been entrusted to us by God to help them to grow to be the persons God intends them to be. □

What is the Focolare Movement?

THE BEGINNINGS

FOCOLARE means "hearth," "family fireside." What first strikes people when they come in contact with members of the Focolare, whether in small groups or in large gatherings, is the atmosphere of a family. It is a family formed by many different people in various walks of life. The Focolare Movement is also known as the "Work of Mary." Under this name it was approved by Pope John XXIII in 1962.

The Focolare Movement began in 1943 in Italy. In the midst of the terrible destruction of World War II, Chiara Lubich realized that God is the only one worth living for. As a result, she began to center her life on the Gospel, together with a small group of young women who followed her. Their ideal became one of striving toward the fulfillment of Jesus' last prayer to the Father: "May they all be one" (Jn.17:21).

The life of Chiara and her first companions, and the spiritual way they spontaneously followed, gave rise to the unique form of spirituality of the Focolare Movement, a spirituality of unity. It has proved to be a powerful means of introducing the Gospel into modern life, of going to God together.

WHO ARE THE FOCOLARINI

Single men and women live in separate communities called Focolare Centers. Their principal aim is to achieve unity among themselves through mutual charity practiced twenty-four hours a day. They follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. They work as other laymen and women in regular jobs and professions.

Some married persons, even though continuing to live in their families, participate fully in the life of either the men's or women's Focolare Centers in their common effort to achieve this same unity. They are called "Married Focolarini" and form the backbone of a vast Movement within the Movement, called the New Family Movement.

THE VOLUNTEERS AND THE NEW HUMANITY MOVEMENT

The Volunteers, also called the "Volunteers of God," are a large group within the Focolare Movement; they would like to transform all human realities according to the Gospel spirit. The Volunteers are the backbone of the mass movement called New Humanity. The aim of this Movement is to help form a society made of men and women who are made "new" by the Gospel message and who can then bring new life to all fields of human activity (education, business, etc.). This results in new social relationships which, in turn, lead to the realization of new structures of society.

GEN

The new generations of the Focolare Movement form another Movement or, better, three movements: the Gen 2, the Gen 3 and the Gen 4 Movements, divided according to their various age groups. "Gen" stands for new generation. The Gen have committed themselves to living the Gospel message of love and to sharing with other youth the conviction they have that the Gospel is the answer to every question and the motive for everything they do.

THE MOVEMENT AMONG THE RELIGIOUS

Men and women religious — although they live according to their own rules and constitutions and are already a distinct part of the Church through their religious families — can also be associated with the Focolare.

Contact with the Movement helps them to focus their attention on the specific charism of their founders, and to see how it can be lived in the present time.

PRIESTS — PRIESTS' MOVEMENT —SEMINARIANS — PARISH MOVEMENT

Many diocesan priests are committed to living the spirituality of the Focolare Movement. Some of them live in community. They form the backbone of the Priests' Movement which is made up of priests who live the spirituality of unity.

FOCOLARE FAMILY

The largest group within the Focolare Movement is made up of men, women and young people who are connected with the Movement without having any formal ties with it. Their bond of unity stems from their acceptance of its spirit and their desire to live it.

ECUMENISM

The Movement not only crossed the political boundaries of more than 100 countries, it has also gone beyond the barriers erected for centuries between the various Christian Churches.

Ecumenical activities take place in the different parts of the world where the Movement exists.

In the past few years a promising, ongoing dialogue has been established with faithful of other religions.

SUMMER MARIAPOLIS

Summer meetings are held every year for those interested in the Movement and for those who wish to come into contact with it. For one week persons of all ages and walks of life are exposed to the spirituality of unity. Above all, they strive to practice it by creating among themselves a rapport that molds them into a community. It is intended to be a basic experience of such intense unity that the people will be able to bring it back into their own environments. And this is the most striking fruit of these conventions. They tend to be models of a world which lives according the Gospel.

PERMANENT MARIAPOLIS

The need to prolong the experience of the summer meetings brought about the birth of small cities called Permanent Mariapolis. They are made up of young men and women, as well as whole families, who are there for a designated period of time to be formed according to the Gospel spirit of unity.

They also attend classes in Sacred Scripture, Theology and Sociology and work for their own support.

MARIAPOLIS CENTERS

In addition to the Permanent Mariapolis, there are Mariapolis Centers, which are training centers for the members of the Movement.

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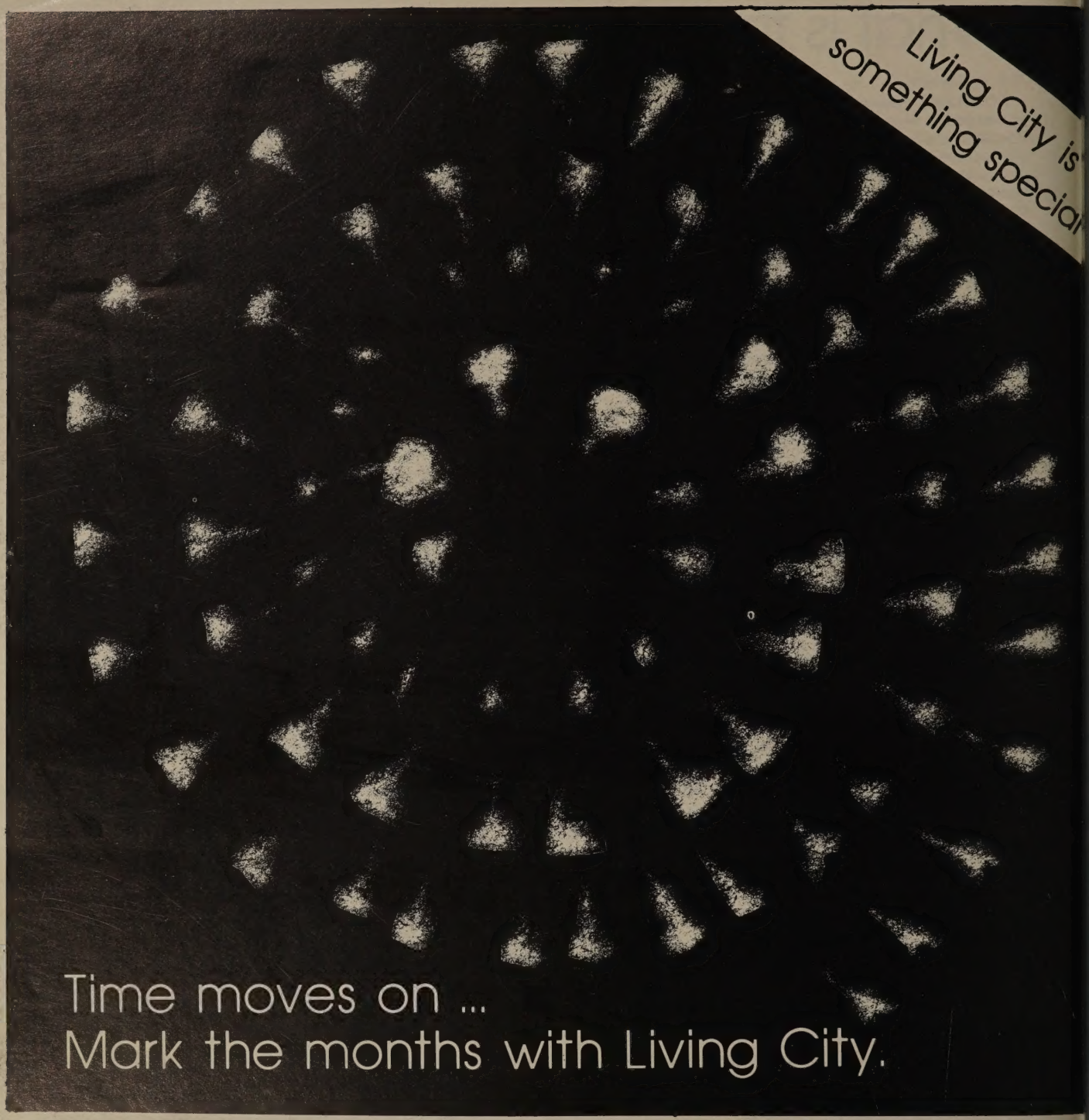

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